

STATEMENT OF A. DURAND JONES, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, UNITED STATES SENATE, CONCERNING THE OVERSIGHT OF THE NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA PROGRAM.

March 30, 2004

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, it is my pleasure to appear before you today to discuss the National Park Service's National Heritage Area Program, to respond to the findings of the General Accounting Office's report, and to present the Department of the Interior's legislative proposal for a National Heritage Partnership Act.

After two decades of experience with national heritage areas, the Department recognizes the need to enact national heritage area legislation to provide criteria for evaluation of potential areas, standards for planning, limitations on funding, and guidance on National Park Service assistance.

National heritage areas are intended to preserve nationally important natural, cultural, historic, and recreational resources through the creation of partnerships among Federal, State and local entities. National heritage areas are locally driven, initiated and managed by the people who live there and do not impose Federal zoning, land use controls nor do they require land acquisition. At its best, the collaborative approach of this program embodies Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton's "Four Cs" – Communication, Consultation and Cooperation, all in the service of Conservation. However, this program may include areas receiving Federal support where national importance has not been demonstrated. The program has grown without specific criteria for assessing an area's national importance and the ability of an area to become self-sufficient. For these reasons, the Department proposes legislation that will set limits and guide future national heritage area proposals.

The National Park Service's 2005 Budget requested less funding for national heritage areas, because we are now focusing our available resources on maintaining and operating national parks. The budget request also reflected concerns that the program lacks an overall authorization or a process for areas to become self-sufficient. So far, no area has "graduated" from the program, even after 20 years in some cases and nearly \$100 million invested overall. In 2004, all 24 designated areas received either grants or line-item construction funding.

The Department's legislative proposal is crafted to address the successes and challenges identified in our two decades of experience working in these community partnerships. As you know, over the last year, this subcommittee has held oversight hearings, facilitated meetings with interested parties, and requested a review by the General Accounting Office (GAO) on the national heritage area program. These efforts have been critical in

gaining insight from all parties and clarifying essential elements for legislative action. In particular, the draft report from the GAO, based on almost a year of research in the field, has cast light on some of the most difficult issues facing the program, and has made valuable recommendations on what can be improved.

The National Park Service mission statement speaks to the importance of partnerships in resource conservation. Successful national heritage areas embody locally driven partnerships that emphasize local control of land use, and blend education, cultural conservation, resource preservation, recreation and community revitalization, all of which are integral parts of the mission of the National Park Service. Our legislative proposal supports this conservation strategy by recognizing that the people who live in a heritage area are uniquely qualified to preserve it. Being designated as a national heritage area can benefit visitors, community residents, existing National Park units located in the area, and other Federal lands by expanding the opportunity to interpret and protect resources over a larger landscape and by telling our shared national stories.

The national heritage area strategy is about fostering a partnership culture at every level of government with each level having an appropriate and complementary role to play. The National Park Service should be the lead partner only when the resources within a proposed heritage area are of national importance. The draft GAO report notes that, at this time, no criteria have been adopted for determining the significance or importance of national heritage area proposals. The Department's legislative proposal addresses this concern by limiting our involvement to regions that have a collection of resources "that together tell nationally important stories based on our country's heritage". While many places in this nation have special meaning to the people that live there, in many cases designation as a State or local heritage area may be most appropriate.

The Department believes that a feasibility study should be required for every proposed national heritage area and the study should be evaluated against legislatively established criteria before designation. These criteria, outlined in our legislative proposal, require that an area provide evidence of place-based resources to tell a nationally important story and of the support and involvement from the local community. This approach has been field-tested and has been shown to increase the future success of the heritage area. Critical elements in the process are public involvement in preparing the feasibility study, demonstration of significant public support for the designation, documented commitment to the proposal from units of government and other parties, the identification of a responsible local coordinating entity, consultation with and concurrence from the managers of any Federal lands within the proposed national heritage area, and the development of a conceptual financial plan outlining the roles of all participants including the Federal government.

After congressional designation, the local coordinating entity for the heritage area develops a management plan to serve as a road map for all stakeholders and a work plan for the expenditure of Federal dollars. The GAO report expressed concern that in the past the Department's authority to approve management plans was not always consistently applied. Our legislative proposal clarifies the timeframe for developing a management plan and the requirement for Secretarial approval. Plans not approved within the

specified three years will be denied funding. Under our proposal, management plans are an essential starting point for a successful national heritage area as they strengthen community involvement, build necessary partnerships, establish performance goals, and expand capacity for collaborative action that will attract a wide range of fundraising dollars.

To be successful, national heritage areas must be guided and supported by local communities and the people that live there. These areas also must work closely with all partners in the region including Federal land management agencies. This is of particular importance in the west where a national heritage area boundary may encompass Federal land designated for many uses. To ensure a constructive partnership, our legislative proposal requires the consultation and concurrence of Federal land management agencies within the boundaries of a proposed national heritage area. In addition to clarifying respective missions, this process of consultation will help identify potential partnerships as envisioned by the Administration's recent Preserve America Executive Order. Under this initiative, local communities and public land partners will collaborate for the promotion of local economic development and heritage tourism through the preservation and productive reuse of historic assets.

Almost 47 million people across 18 states live within a national heritage area. The draft GAO report concluded that national heritage area designation does not impinge on the rights of private property owners. Our legislative proposal contains safeguards to ensure that private property owners are provided with reasonable protections. National heritage area designation does not involve the acquisition of land, or impose zoning or land use controls by the Federal government or local coordinating entities. In fact, the support of private property owners and other community members for a national heritage area designation is an integral part of the feasibility study.

When the first national heritage corridors were designated twenty years ago, a Federal commission provided management for the areas and the National Park Service provided most of the staff. The national heritage corridor or area was conceived as a less expensive alternative to the acquisition and operating costs of creating a new unit of the National Park System. These areas were originally authorized for five years with a five-year extension; over time, the corridors have been reauthorized for additional periods. For the 18 national heritage areas established after 1995, the National Park Service encouraged greater involvement by local entities and a more cost-effective use of Federal resources. These newer areas are managed by a non-profit entity or a State government and include a funding formula of not more than \$10 million federal dollars over a fifteen-year period. Our legislative proposal codifies this approach and for the first time requires that a business plan be developed as part of management planning for proposed new areas. This will ensure that from the beginning, national heritage areas are working towards and have an established plan for self-sufficiency. We also recognize the need to work with existing areas to assist them in a transition strategy as they reach the end of their funding authorization. As areas become self-sufficient, available resources could be reallocated to newly designated areas or other priorities.

National heritage areas demonstrate excellence in the areas of partnership, leveraging funding from a variety of sources, and education. Partnerships are the way that heritage areas conduct business. In 2003, the 24 national heritage areas reported 996 formalized partnerships (based on project agreements) and 2,480 informal partnerships. These partnerships help us achieve that part of our mission statement that declares "...the Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation through the country...". Last year, national heritage areas awarded 117 grants to assist National Register listed or eligible properties and 67 grants for recreational trails. In total, 367 project grants leveraged \$29,276,585 in additional funds for resource conservation.

Although funding for national heritage areas require a one-for-one match, these areas go on to leverage a great deal more than that. The draft GAO report cited National Park Service dollars were used to leverage funds from State and local governments, other Federal agencies, and private sources. In our review a year ago, the National Park Service found that since 1985, Congress has appropriated \$107,225,378 to the National Park Service under the Heritage Partnership Program to support heritage area projects and programs. This allocation has leveraged \$929,097,491 in non-National Park Service partnership funds, an impressive 1 to 8.7 match. A well-established national heritage area will have a balanced funding mix from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of Transportation Enhancement Funds, other Federal programs, State government, local government, and the private sector. The national heritage area model of collaborative funding demonstrates the value of partnership.

National heritage areas understand the value of telling the story of their region's heritage to both visitors and more importantly, to the next generation of citizens. Some examples of their award winning programs include the work of Ranger Chuck Arning in the John F. Chaffee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, who won both the 1997 National Freeman Tilden Award for Interpretive Ranger of the Year for the television series entitled "*Along the Blackstone*", and the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom's **Freedom Star Award** for this series. In 2003, Ranger Suzanne Buchanan from the Blackstone won the Northeast Region's Freeman Tilden Award for the Volunteer Program in the Blackstone River Valley. Last year, the Silos and Smokestacks National Heritage Area's website (<http://www.campsilos.org>) won a 2nd place Media Award from the National Association for Interpretation; this website reaches 25,000 regional and worldwide visitors monthly. Overall in 2003, national heritage areas managed 513 different educational program reaching 740,775 people.

Recent studies and our own experiences have shown that the national heritage area approach links people and place, nature and culture, and the present with the past. National heritage areas capitalize on the unique role local communities play in caring for their heritage and telling their stories. Our legislative proposal respects these principles. It also recognizes the need to target our assistance to those areas where there is a national interest and where the local partners meet established criteria for success. We hope to work with all parties to craft a program that responds to the draft GAO report, is held accountable for public investment, and builds on the successful practices in the field.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Chairman Thomas for his assistance in evaluating the national heritage area program, in identifying areas for improvement, and supporting our efforts to draft program legislation. This concludes my prepared remarks and I will be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.